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Knowmad Institute's Final Report of Recommendations on the UN Cybercrime Convention (May 2024)

FINAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO
ELABORATE A COMPREHENSIVE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON
COUNTERING THE USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS
TECHNOLOGIES FOR CRIMINAL PURPOSES, ON THE UPDATED TEXT OF THE
CONVENTION DATED MAY 2024.

European Institute for Multidisciplinary Studies on Human Rights and Sciences - Knowmad Institut.

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INTRODUCTION

The **Knowmad Institut - European Institute for Multidisciplinary Studies on Human Rights and Sciences**, committed to promoting human dignity and sustainable development, presents the following comments and recommendations for the updated text of the **International Convention On Countering The Use Of Information And Communications Technologies For Criminal Purposes ([A/AC.291/22/Rev.3](#))**. These recommendations are based on a detailed analysis of the draft convention, the supplementary documents with references [A/AC.291/25/Rev.1](#) and [A/AC.291/27](#), and the previous contributions of the Knowmad Institut to this distinguished committee ([Recs. 3ra Sesión](#); [Recs. 4ta Sesión](#)). Our approach focuses on ensuring that the convention protects human rights and dignity, promotes international cooperation, and adopts a balanced and effective approach to combating cybercrime.

Note: This document is a condensed version of our comprehensive analysis and comments, which are [available here](#).



PREAMBLE

The Knowmad Institute, known for its multidisciplinary approach to human rights and science studies, has actively participated in previous sessions of the Ad Hoc Committee to elaborate a comprehensive international convention against the criminal use of information and communication technologies (ICT). In our previous contributions, we emphasized the importance of a balanced and comprehensive approach that respects the right to anonymity and personal data protection to create safe spaces in cyberspace. However, the most crucial aspect we highlighted was the need for promoting and protecting human rights to be the primary objectives when regulating ICT. This ensures that access to technology improves the quality of life without infringing on rights and freedoms, a principle of utmost importance.

We proposed the inclusion of a specific clause to protect vulnerable groups and prioritize the inclusive representation of individuals exposed to conflicts or persecutions of a political, ethnic, religious, or migratory nature. Furthermore, we emphasized the need to adopt an intersectional human rights approach with a gender perspective and the relevance of open science as a tool to prevent the criminal use of information and communication technologies (ICT). We consider it particularly urgent to address the potential threats of persecution due to migratory origin, recognizing that the diversity of dialects, especially in regions of the global south, can be mistakenly interpreted as an “encryption” method for possible criminal messages. This perspective is essential to strengthen international cooperation in preventing cybercrime and hybrid crimes, as well as in the interception of telecommunications, ensuring an inclusive and non-discriminatory approach to crime prevention.

We underscore the collective concern about the challenges posed by outsourced espionage services and intelligence gathering, highlighting the need for rigorous regulation and oversight to protect the physical integrity of individuals within organized civil society in particular and society in general. Additionally, we addressed the issue of trafficking controlled substances via the Internet and its impact on public health, suggesting harm reduction and deflection strategies to mitigate the adverse effects on the community.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations and comments on the draft convention identified as [A/AC.291/22/Rev.3](#) emphasize the protection of human rights and privacy, aligning with international standards such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The importance of updating and clarifying definitions regarding emerging technologies is highlighted to ensure effective and adaptive regulation.

Our recommendations and comments on the draft convention identified as A/AC.291/22/Rev.3 emphasize the protection of human rights and privacy, aligning with international standards such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We highlight the importance of updating and clarifying definitions regarding emerging technologies to ensure effective and adaptive regulation.

We propose the incorporation of independent oversight and evaluation mechanisms that involve civil society, ensuring that the measures adopted are fair and respect human rights. Additionally, we recommend implementing educational and preventive programs to raise awareness about ICT security and mitigate the risks associated with cybercrime.

It is advised to clearly define the actions that constitute crimes in the digital realm and establish proportional sanctions that are both deterrent and commensurate with the severity of the offenses. Special protection for minors and the promotion of international cooperation to combat online child abuse are also suggested.

Fostering international cooperation and harmonizing laws is emphasized for a coordinated and effective response against cybercrime. This includes clarifying jurisdiction and improving legal procedures to facilitate efficient investigations and prosecutions.

The recommendations also address the importance of protecting personal data during international transfers and establishing clear regulations for extradition that respect human rights. Once personal data has been used, it should be deleted depending on the case. Additionally, it is recommended that the transfer of criminal proceedings be facilitated and mutual legal assistance between states be improved to strengthen the global fight against cybercrime.

Furthermore, the need to create and strengthen laws in the States Parties to protect witnesses and whistleblowers from retaliation, including intimidation and



harassment, is underscored. This requires establishing witness protection programs, which include specific measures such as physical protection or relocation, as well as mechanisms for non-disclosure of information regarding the identity and whereabouts of witnesses.

In this regard, it is proposed to apply protection measures to both victims and witnesses, providing psychological and legal support so they can testify without fear of reprisals. It is also suggested that these witnesses and whistleblowers of cybercrimes be monitored to ensure the effectiveness of the protection measures.

Finally, we recommend adopting international standards, such as those of the Budapest Convention, to align standards and facilitate global cooperation. This includes consulting with experts and stakeholders to recommend robust reforms with clear definitions that ensure the proportionality of penalties, as well as strengthening the technological infrastructure to detect and effectively respond to cybercrime. Training judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers are essential to ensure the proper handling of crimes committed in cyberspace or in a hybrid manner within the judicial system. Public awareness campaigns can help prevent these crimes by informing citizens about risks and protection measures.

In summary, our recommendations aim to establish a robust framework that respects human rights and dignity, enabling the effective prevention and prosecution of cybercrime while protecting individuals' integrity and privacy in the digital environment. Implementing these measures will promote balanced and effective international cooperation while ensuring human dignity and sustainable development.

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Thematic Recommendations

Protection of Human Rights and Privacy

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 1, Article 6.
- **Detail:** Ensure that all measures adopted respect human rights and privacy by explicitly referencing existing human rights frameworks, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (United Nations,

1966). This approach protects fundamental freedoms and reinforces the legitimacy of actions against cybercrime (Meier et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2022; Montal & Pauselli, 2023; Ajoy, 2022; Da-Yu Kao et al., 2019; Feldle, 2020; Kennedy & Warren, 2020; Ahsan et al., 2022).

Clear and Updated Definitions

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 2, Article 3.
- **Detail:** Include additional definitions reflecting emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, the Internet of Things (IoT), and blockchain. Establish a mechanism for the periodic review and update of definitions to ensure their continuous relevance (Weber, 2009; Lobach et al., 2021; Aulia, 2023; Han, 2023; Klevtsov, 2020; Varshney et al., 2020; Balajanov, 2018).

Oversight and Evaluation Measures

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 6, Article 24.
- **Detail:** Establish independent oversight and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that measures adopted under the convention align with international human rights standards. The creation of oversight committees and the involvement of civil society organizations and other stakeholders are highly recommended (Cross, 2017; Curtis & Oxburgh, 2023; Holt, 2018; Mantovani, 2020; Nurahman, 2019; Brenner & Clarke, 2009).

Preventive and Educational Measures

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 7, Article 8, Article 9, Article 11.
- **Detail:** In addition to criminalization, include provisions on preventive measures and educational programs to raise societal awareness about ICT security and prevent cybercrime incidents (Krastev, 2022; ECPAT International, 2016; Gunarto et al., 2023; Grauer, 2022; Saxena, 2023; Cerezo et al., 2007; Kagita et al., 2020).

Clarification of Scope and Sanctions

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 10, Article 12, Article 13.
- **Detail:** Clearly define what constitutes interference and falsification in the context of electronic data and systems. Establish proportional and effective sanctions, adjusted to the severity of the offense, ensuring that the sanctions are both deterrent and just (Aldridge et al., 2017; Ajoy, 2022; Kaur, 2021; Sabu et al., 2023; Sprott, 2006; Khan et al., 2022).



Protection of Minors and Special Measures

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 14, Article 15, Article 16.
- **Detail:** Clearly define "child sexual abuse material," "solicitation," and "harassment" to avoid ambiguous interpretations that may result in legal loopholes and ineffective protection for minors. Include coordinated support and rehabilitation mechanisms for victims, and promote international cooperation to prevent and prosecute online child sexual abuse (Interpol, 2022; Bunga & Hiariej, 2019; Henry et al., 2020; Irawan et al., 2022; Citron & Franks, 2014; Knowmad Institute, 2023).

International Cooperation and Harmonization of Laws

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 17, Article 18, Article 19, Article 22, Article 23.
- **Detail:** Foster international cooperation and harmonization of laws among Member States to ensure a coordinated and effective response to cybercrime. Establish clear coordination and collaboration mechanisms (Broadhurst, 2017; Skulysh, 2014; Wingfield & Wingo, 2021; Dragomir, 2022; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017; Mabeka & Cassim, 2023).

Jurisdiction and Law Enforcement

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 19, Article 21, Article 24, Article 25.
- **Detail:** Ensure that Member States clearly define the limits and scope of their jurisdiction over cybercrimes and adopt legislative measures that allow for the effective implementation of the necessary powers and procedures for investigations and prosecutions (Hursevich, 2019; PTACC, 2022; Nurahman, 2020; Ruslan, 2023; Wilson, 2008; Setiawahyudi, 2015; Snail, 2009; Szongoth & Vetter, 2018; Teichmann & Wittmann, 2022; Tiutiuhin, 2022; Veresha, 2018; Voynova, 2015; Wicki-Birchler, 2020).

Preservation and Partial Disclosure of Traffic Data

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 26.
- **Detail:** Ensure the prompt preservation of traffic data, even when multiple service providers are involved. Implement clear procedures for the rapid disclosure of traffic data to competent authorities. The convention could specify the timeframes and conditions under which service providers must provide this data (Wicki-Birchler, 2020; Saxena, 2023).



Production Order

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 27.
- **Detail:** Adopt clear legislative measures specifying the procedures and requirements for issuing production orders. Include adequate safeguards to protect individuals' privacy and rights when production orders are issued. Promote transparent collaboration between competent authorities and service providers for user data (Curtis & Oxburgh, 2023; Wicki-Birchler, 2020; Saxena, 2023).

Search and Seizure of Stored Electronic Data

Real-Time Collection of Data

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 28, Article 29.
- **Detail:** Specify the procedures for the search and seizure of electronic data and the real-time collection of data, ensuring that competent authorities can act efficiently and within the established legal framework. Include provisions to maintain the integrity and security of electronic data during and after its collection or seizure. Promote collaboration with experts in information technology, telecommunications, and ethics (Curtis & Oxburgh, 2023; Feldle, 2020; Da-Yu Kao et al., 2019; Wicki-Birchler, 2020; Saxena, 2023).

Content Data Interception

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 30.
- **Detail:** Specify the procedures and requirements for intercepting content data, ensuring that competent authorities can act efficiently and within the established legal framework. Mandate service providers to fully cooperate with competent authorities and maintain the technical capability to intercept and record content data in real time. Include provisions to ensure the confidentiality of content data interception (Clough, 2015; Han, 2023; Sabu et al., 2023).

Freezing, Seizing, and Confiscating Crime Proceeds

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 31.
- **Detail:** Implement clear legislative measures to allow the confiscation of proceeds of crime and assets used in the commission of cybercrimes. Ensure that authorities have the legal and technical tools necessary to identify, trace, and freeze assets related to cybercrimes. Establish clear procedures for the administration of frozen, seized, or confiscated assets (Setiawahyudi, 2015; Snail, 2009; Rajaan & Dadhich, 2020).



Establishment of a Criminal Registry

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 32.
- **Detail:** Adopt legislative measures that allow the consideration of prior convictions from other States in national criminal proceedings. Establish international cooperation mechanisms to facilitate the exchange of information on prior convictions between States. Include safeguards to protect the rights of the accused (Tiutiuhin, 2022; Sprott, 2006; Papai-Tarr, 2020).

Witness Protection

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 33.
- **Detail:** Create and strengthen laws to protect witnesses and whistleblowers from retaliation, including intimidation and harassment. Establish specific measures such as physical protection or relocation and create mechanisms for the non-disclosure of information about the identity and whereabouts of witnesses. Apply protection measures to both victims and witnesses, providing psychological and legal support (Sarkar & Shukla, 2023; Nurahman, 2020).

Assistance and Protection for Victims

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 34.
- **Detail:** Implement legislative measures to guarantee assistance and protection for victims of cybercrimes, including mechanisms for psychological and physical support. Establish clear procedures for victims to obtain compensation and restitution. Include the opinions and concerns of victims in criminal proceedings (Mabeka & Cassim, 2023; Agung et al., 2023; Veresha, 2018).

General Principles of International Cooperation

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 35.
- **Detail:** Strengthen international cooperation mechanisms, ensuring clear and effective protocols for collaboration in cybercrime investigations. Harmonize national legislation with international standards (Klevtsov, 2020; Cerezo et al., 2007; Skulysh, 2014).

Protection of Personal Data

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 36.
- **Detail:** Adopt clear legislative measures regulating the transfer of personal data in accordance with national and international laws. Establish bilateral or multilateral agreements to facilitate the secure transfer of personal data.



Ensure that received personal data is subject to effective and appropriate safeguards (Gulczyńska, 2021; Mantovani, 2020; Buković, 2020).

Transfer of Criminal Proceedings

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 39.
- **Detail:** Adopt legislative measures that facilitate the transfer of criminal proceedings. Establish bilateral or multilateral agreements to facilitate the transfer of criminal proceedings that respect the human rights of the accused (Voynova, 2015; Klevtsov, 2020; Hursevich, 2019).

General Principles and Procedures Related to Mutual Legal Assistance

- **Incorporation in Articles:** Article 40.
- **Detail:** Adopt clear legislative measures and procedures to facilitate mutual legal assistance in cybercrime investigations. Promote international collaboration through bilateral and multilateral agreements. Ensure that mutual legal assistance procedures respect the human rights of all parties involved (Hunton, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Mabeka & Cassim, 2023).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Knowmad Institute urges the Ad Hoc Committee to consider these recommendations to ensure that the proposed convention not only effectively combats cybercrime but also respects and protects human rights and fundamental freedoms. Implementing these recommendations will promote balanced and effective international cooperation while guaranteeing human dignity and sustainable development.

Additionally, the convention must consider and mitigate any potential misuse of surveillance technologies. We are concerned that the convention's approach could be interpreted and used to justify mass surveillance that infringes on fundamental rights to privacy and free movement, especially in the Global North, and that this would disproportionately affect migrant and displaced populations. Clear and strict safeguards must be established to prevent the instrumentalization of these measures against vulnerable groups, ensuring that any actions taken under this convention are carried out with full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the principles established in the United Nations Charter.



Cybercrime is a phenomenon that can affect daily activities, compromise privacy, and violate the rights of those who use technologies and the internet. Given its range (from economic fraud to cyberbullying and the most severe offenses related to child sexual exploitation and others that deeply endanger and violate people's rights and dignity), it is essential that the Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communication Technologies for Criminal Purposes explicitly references international human rights frameworks, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of the United Nations. This will ensure that measures against cybercrime align with international human rights standards, reinforce their legitimacy, and foster cooperation among Member States.

Secondly, continuous updating of definitions and measures against cybercrime is necessary, as the dynamics of coexistence, socialization, transaction, and even decision-making and development of activities in the social, political, and cultural spheres in cyberspace are renewed and transformed rapidly. This has created gaps and inequalities in terms of access to and delivery of justice when fundamental rights are violated. This also implies clarifying key terms, starting with cybercrime and its modalities, to avoid ambiguous use that could lead to misleading interpretations. It is proposed that examples be used when technical terms are employed.

It is essential to clarify the scope of the definition of offenses, specifying that these can be committed by natural persons, legal entities, and state and parastatal entities. It includes espionage perpetrated by these entities against activists, journalists, and other civil society actors.

It is crucial to implement educational and awareness programs on ICT security and cybercrime prevention. These programs should be designed to inform users about the risks associated with ICT use and include recommendations and preventive measures in the various spheres of users' development. It is also essential to have procedures to recover and preserve information, as necessary, to minimize the impact of any incident in cyberspace or hybrid space.

In this regard, another critical aspect is comprehensive support for victims of cybercrimes, including counseling and legal assistance services. For this to be effective, prevention programs should be backed by continuous human rights training for law enforcement officers, judges, prosecutors, and victim support staff, such as doctors, psychologists, and social workers, on the rights and needs of victims to foster a culture of empathy and support, aiming to promote a culture of respect and protection in all related actions and decisions.



The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrined the right to access justice. Therefore, Member States must ensure that individuals (regardless of nationality, ethnic origin, migratory background, gender, creed, or ideology) can access and defend their rights in fair and impartial processes. This relates to the sanctions resulting from these processes, which must be proportional and effective, as not all cybercrimes have the same impact. Therefore, sanctions can range from complementary measures linked to cybersecurity education programs, deterrent economic penalties for restitution to cybercrime victims, and even imprisonment.

We call on Member States to maintain a human rights-centered approach when formulating and applying measures against cybercrime, protecting and promoting the dignity of every individual. Only then can we build a safe and just digital environment for all.

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